DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 125 821 BC 009 305

AUTHOR	Popp, James A.
TITLE	An Examination of Children's Books on the American Indian.
INSTITUTION	Bureau of Indian Affairs (Dept. of Interior), Albuquerque, N. Mex.
PUB DATE	Jan 75
NOTE	18p.
JOURNAL CIT	BIA Education Research Bulletin; v3 n1 p10-23 Jan 1975
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*American Indians; *Childrens Books; *Content Analysis; Cultural Awareness; Cultural Context; Evaluation; Illustrations; Information Utilization; *Language; *Negative Attitudes; *Stereotypes; Validity; Vocabulary

ABSTRACT

In an effort to determine whether or not children's books on the American Indian were perpetuating false myths, stereotypes, and negative attitudes, 49 children's books (all the books from the Acomita Day School and a random selection from the Albuquerque Public library and the Learning Materials Center at the University of New Mexico) were read and evaluated in terms of: (1) attitude expressed (author's attitude toward Indians); (2) derogatory language (e.g., warlike, savage, brown men, barbarians, etc.); (3) stereotyping by terminology and/or pictures; (4) knowledge expressed by the author; (5) usefulness of the book in the classroom (based on use at Acomita Day School in Albuquerque, New Mexico); (6) the degree of depth or superficiality of the book (based on research and incorporating informative detail). Evaluation indicated that out of the 49 books read: 7 expressed a negative attitude toward Indians; 6 had some derogatory language and 3 had a lot of derogatory language; 20 had a little or some stereotyping in the terminology, while 27 had a little, some, or a lot of stereotyping in the pictures; 18 demonstrated excellent subject knowledge, while 23 showed fair and 8 showed poor subject knowledge; 23 rated extremely useful, while 4 rated very useful, 14 rated fairly useful, and 8 rated not useful at all; 16 were superficially written, while 33 demonstrated in-depth attention. (JC)

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ED125821

BIA Education Research Bulletin

PUBLISHED PERIODICALLY BY THE
DIVISION OF EVALUATION, RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
FOR TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS WHO ARE DEDICATED
TO IMPROVING INDIAN EDUCATION

VOLUME 3 JANUARY 1975 NUMBER 1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
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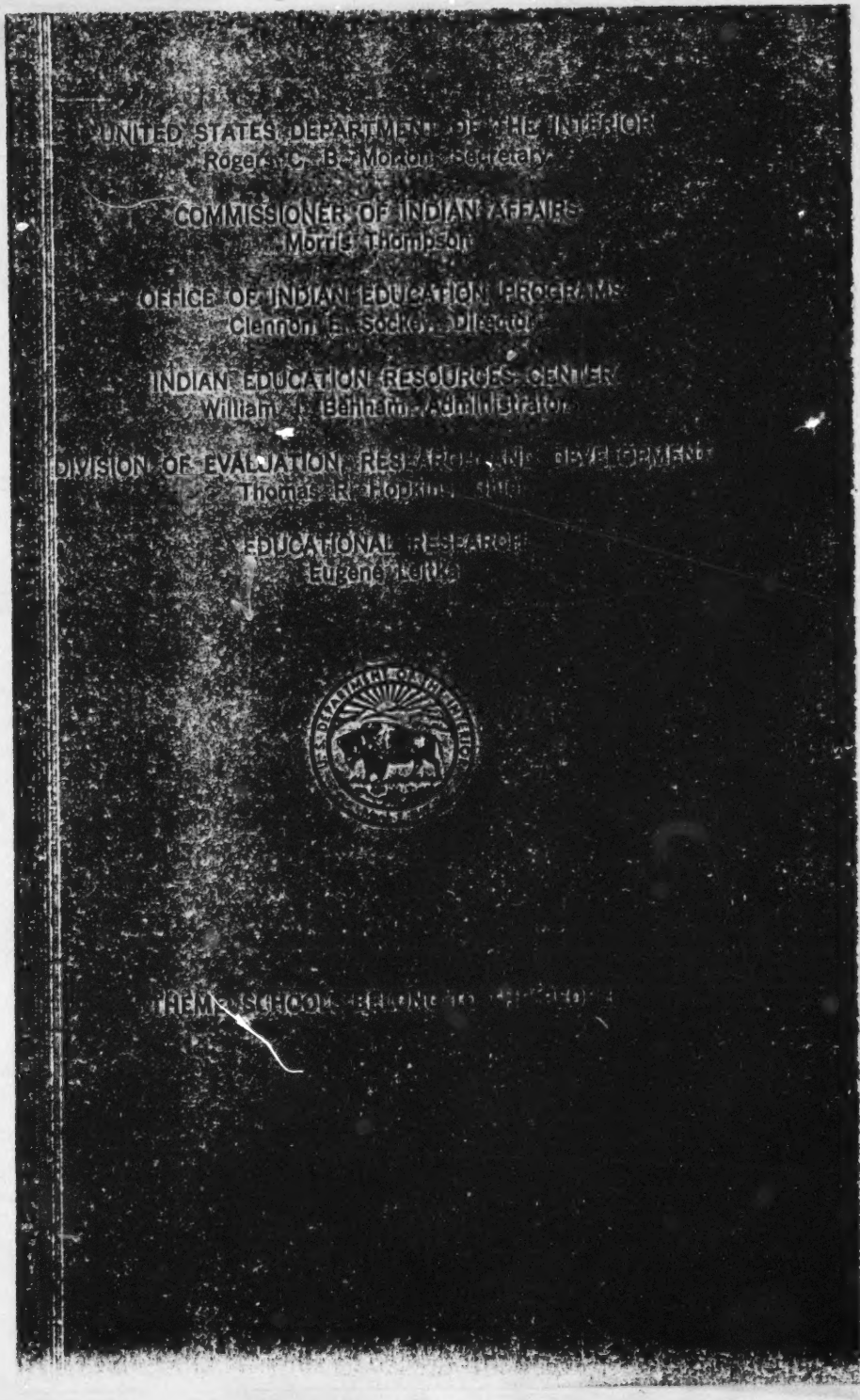
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AN EXAMINATION OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS ON THE AMERICAN INDIAN

by

James A. Popp

During the first week of school this year the teachers in the intermediate unit at the Acomita Day School decided the students would start the year off with the preparation for and the celebration of American Indian Day. The celebration would be on Friday, September 27th, four weeks away, and would concentrate on presenting great American Indian leaders of the past and present and contributions of the American Indian culture to the American culture.

Through our celebration of American Indian Day we hoped to achieve three goals. First, we felt school should begin on an exciting note which preparation for a parade and a feast would generate. Second, we wanted to instill self-pride within our students and the celebration of American Indian Day would be a celebration of the self for them. Third, we wanted our students to be able to demonstrate knowledge of great American Indian leaders and of American Indian contributions. The goals were set and our next move was to collect materials for reference and at this point, my involvement with children's books about the American Indian really began.

I collected children's books on the American Indian from our three main sources, The University of New Mexico Learning Materials Center, the Albuquerque Public Library, and our school library, and distributed them for use on our American Indian Day project.

To my group of students I began reading from a nice looking little book, *Pueblo Indian Stories* and on the second page I read, "Orange Cloud and her family lived in a house that you would think was queer. The Pueblo Indians lived in queer houses years ago. They made their homes on high rocks."[1] Luckily I proof read

silently as I read orally and changed Orange Cloud to Juanita, queer to beautiful, and rocks to mesas. I then decided I had better come back to that book.

After school that day two other teachers showed me books they had begun reading to their classes and had stopped because of the attitude expressed, derogatory language used or stereotyping presented. One of those books, *Learning From the Indians* by Wharton James, has a foreword entitled, "What the White Race May Learn From the Indian" and is filled with lines such as: "There are scores of things about the Indian that are reprehensible and to be avoided."[2] The other book was *Indian Friends and Foes* by Dorothy Heiderstadt. The students wanted to know about the great Apache leader Geronimo so the teacher opened the book to chapter 13, and then suggested a different topic, for the chapter was entitled "Geronimo: The Last Barbarian."[3]

My mind instantly recalled the powerful book, *Tell Them They Lie: The Sequoyah Myth* by Traveller Bird in which the author and sixteen other direct heirs of George Guess, the white man's Sequoyah, try to correct historical guesswork about who George Guess was and what he did for his people. Was it possible that a great number of children's books on the American Indian were not based on true facts and in-depth research by the authors? Could it be that children's books on the American Indian were perpetuating false myths, stereotypes, and negative attitudes toward the American Indian people?

I was curious to look into these questions further and the remainder of this paper deals with my study, my findings, my conclusions and my suggestions.

American Indian Day at Acomita Day School was a great success but it would have been more so if the children's books on American Indians had been more useful.

Last summer and again this fall I have been fortunate to see a videotaped lesson on education across cultures by Dr. John A. Aragon from the College of Education at the University of New Mexico. In this lesson, Dr. Aragon brings forth what a delicate and responsible job teaching in any ordinary situtaion is and then, when it crosses back and forth between two cultures, teaching becomes extremely tenous and requires a great deal of expertise and

sensetivity on the teacher's part. He proposes the theory of perceiving, behaving, and becoming, which simply interpreted means a person perceives himself through the words and actions of others, shapes his behavior around those perceptions and will eventually become the person he behaves like.

If a teacher in New York reads the book *Indian Friends and Foes* to her non-Indian class some damage is done just from the title and the cover pictures which immediately stereotype the Indian men as being red skinned with hachet features and the women as being the fairytale beautiful princesses. The non-Indian child thinks the Indian is either good or bad. The men are ugly and mean-looking so they must be bad. But the women must be friends because they are beautiful and kind-looking. By just using the word Indian, and not Indians, the author has already stereotyped the Indian people as not being distinguishable groups.

Think of the potential damage done as a teacher reads this book to a class of Indian children. The Indian child might perceive just from the title and cover pictures that Indian men are ugly and mean-looking and can either be friends or foes and nowhere in between. Therefore being an Indian man, or related to one, would gain a negative connotation.

Just from the title and cover picture of one widespread book unaccountable damage may be done to children's perceptions, thus to their behavior, and finally to what they become. Teachers have mammoth jobs when teaching across two or more cultures. They must be familiar with the values of those cultures, working with them, and blending the cultures as evenly as possible. They often need assistance and one place they rely on is the library and its collection of books.

A teacher cannot possibly know the contents and how useful every book in the school library will be. But if a teacher constantly chooses books written for children that cause the children to perceive themselves or others negatively then something is wrong and some action must be taken.

The American Indian Day project at Acomita Day School gave me the necessary incentive to read all the children's books on the American Indian in our school's library plus randomly selected

books from the Albuquerque Public Library and from the Learning Materials Center at the University of New Mexico. I am by no means a licensed critic of children's literature or an expert on the life ways of the American Indian people. I am a teacher who teaches in a bi-lingual and a bi-cultural community and who is extremely sensitive to having the children I teach perceive themselves in a positive manner. Thus my work and study has been that of a concerned amateur.

After reading each of the books, I marked down its relevance to each of the following categories: attitude expressed, derogatory language, stereotyping by terminology and pictures, knowledge expressed by the author, the book's usefulness in the classroom, and if it is an in-depth or superficial report or study.

Attitude expressed is a category which judges the author's feelings towards the American Indian. It is very subjective and is marked either positive or negative.

Derogatory language is much more objective and is marked none, some, or a lot. Examples of what I consider derogatory language are the terms: warlike, savage, brown men, barbarians, pagans, redskins, etc.

Stereotyping is fairly clear and can or cannot be found in the author's terminology and in the illustrator's pictures. In the following charts T stands for terminology and P stands for pictures and they have a yes or no after them, yes indicating there is stereotyping and no indicating there is no stereotyping. Examples of terminology stereotyping are: "Very slowly they are adopting the white man's ways, but they cannot be rushed."[4], "Tomorrow the sick man will go to the Public Health hospital, but he wanted the services of the medicine man first."[5], "They thought they were chasing sickness away."[6], "Indians — red savages, noble, perhaps, but savages all the same . . ."[7], "The plains Indians were very warlike, . . ."[8], "We must build an igloo . . ."[9], and "Their old way of living is ended and they haven't yet found a good new way. But they are still the Laughing People."[10]

Examples of picture stereotyping are: Eskimos standing near igloos in heavy, bright colored clothes, always looking happy, with a dogsled, polar bears, and seals nearby; Indian men having war

bonnets, buckskins, warpaint, a single feather, and a loincloth on and are shown riding bareback shooting buffalo; and Indian women shown grinding corn, scraping hides, or carry babies on their backs.

The catagory knowledge expressed is again very subjective and is marked excellent, fair, or poor. It is a feeling derived from how the author uses names, dates, places, and culturally relevant materials in the report or story.

Usefulness is a subjective catagory that would vary in relevancy from teacher to teacher and from class to class. I have based my markings on how beneficial and important it is to have the book at the Acomita Day School. I have thus marked the books as being extremely, fairly, or not useful.

The last category is marked in depth or superficial and I judged each book subjectively as to whether I thought the author had done research and had expressed it by going into informative detail or whether the author was using a little literary license and writing for capital gain alone.

The following five charts show how I have catagorized the forty-nine books I read for this paper.

Out of the 49 books read, 7 seemed to definately express a negative attitude toward American Indians. Six had some derogatory language and three had a lot of derogatory language. Twenty books had a little or some stereotyping in the terminology while twenty-seven had a little, some, or a lot of stereotyping in the illustrations. Eighteen of the books showed their authors had excellent knowledge of the subject, while twenty-three showed fair knowledge and eight showed poor subject knowledge. Twenty-three of the books rated extremely useful, four rated very useful, fourteen rated fairly useful, and eight rated not useful. Sixteen of the books were superficially written while thirty-three were written in depth.

As I previously stated I am not a professional critic and this was not that objective of a survey but it showed me what I was afraid of is true to a large degree. Well over half of the authors did not seem to have done any indepth research for true facts on which to base their stories. And far too many of the books seemed

Title	Attitude Expressed	Derogatory Language	Stereotyping Terminology & Pictures	Knowledge Expressed	Usefulness	In depth Superficial
Luke & The Indians	Positive	Some	T: yes P: yes	Poor	Not useful	Superficial
Teepee Days: Tales of the Prairies	Positive	None	T: yes P: yes	Fair	Fair	In depth
Learning from the Indians	Negative	A lot	T: yes P: no	Excellent	Very useful	In depth
The Talking Leaf	Negative	None	T: yes P: yes	Poor	Not useful	Superficial
The Taos Indians & Their Sacred Blue Lake	Positive	None	T: no P: no	Excellent	Extremely	In depth
Little Sioux Girl	Positive	None	T: no P: no	Excellent	Extremely	In depth
Antelope: A Navajo Indian Boy	Positive	None	T: no P: no	Fair	Fair	Superficial
Leaping Trout: A Little Iroquois Boy	Positive	None	T: no P: yes	Fair	Fair	Superficial

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Title	Attitude Expressed	Derogatory Language	Stereotyping Terminology & Pictures	Knowledge Expressed	Usefulness	In depth Superficial
Nigalek: A Little Eskimo Boy	Positive	None	T: no P: yes	Fair	Fair	Superficial
Watlala: An Indian of the Northest	Positive	None	T: no P: yes	Fair	Fair	Superficial
Sequoyah: Leader of the Cherokees	Negative	Some	T: yes P: yes	Poor	Not useful	Superficial
The True Book of Indians	Extremely Negative	A lot	T: yes P: yes	Poor	Not useful	Superficial
Eskimo of Little Diomede	Extremely Positive	None	T: no P: no	Excellent	Extremely	In depth
The First Book of the Indian Wars	Positive	None	T: no P: yes	Excellent	Fair	In depth
The Indians Knew	Positive	None	T: yes P: yes	Poor	Fair	Superficial
Here is Your Hobby . . . Indian Dancing & Costumes	Positive	Some	T: yes P: yes	Fair	Not useful	In depth

Title	Attitude Expressed	Derogatory Language	Stereotyping Terminology & Pictures	Knowledge Expressed	Usefulness	In depth Superficial
Bird Gir: Sacagawea	Positive	None	T: yes P: yes	Fair	Fair	Superficial
Getting to Know American Indians Today	Positive	None	T: little P. yes	Fair	Fair	In depth
Geronimo	Positive	None	T: yes P: yes	Fair	Fair	In depth
Friday: The Arapaho Indian	Negative	None	T: yes P: yes	Poor	Not useful	Superficial
Only the Names Remain: The Cherokees & the Trail of Tears	Positive	None	T: no P: no	Excellent	Extremely	In depth
American Indian Hopi & Zuni Pueblos - Read & Color	Positive	None	T: little P: no	Fair	Extremely	In depth
American Indian Navajo Read & Color	Positive	None	T: no P: no	Fair	Extremely	In depth

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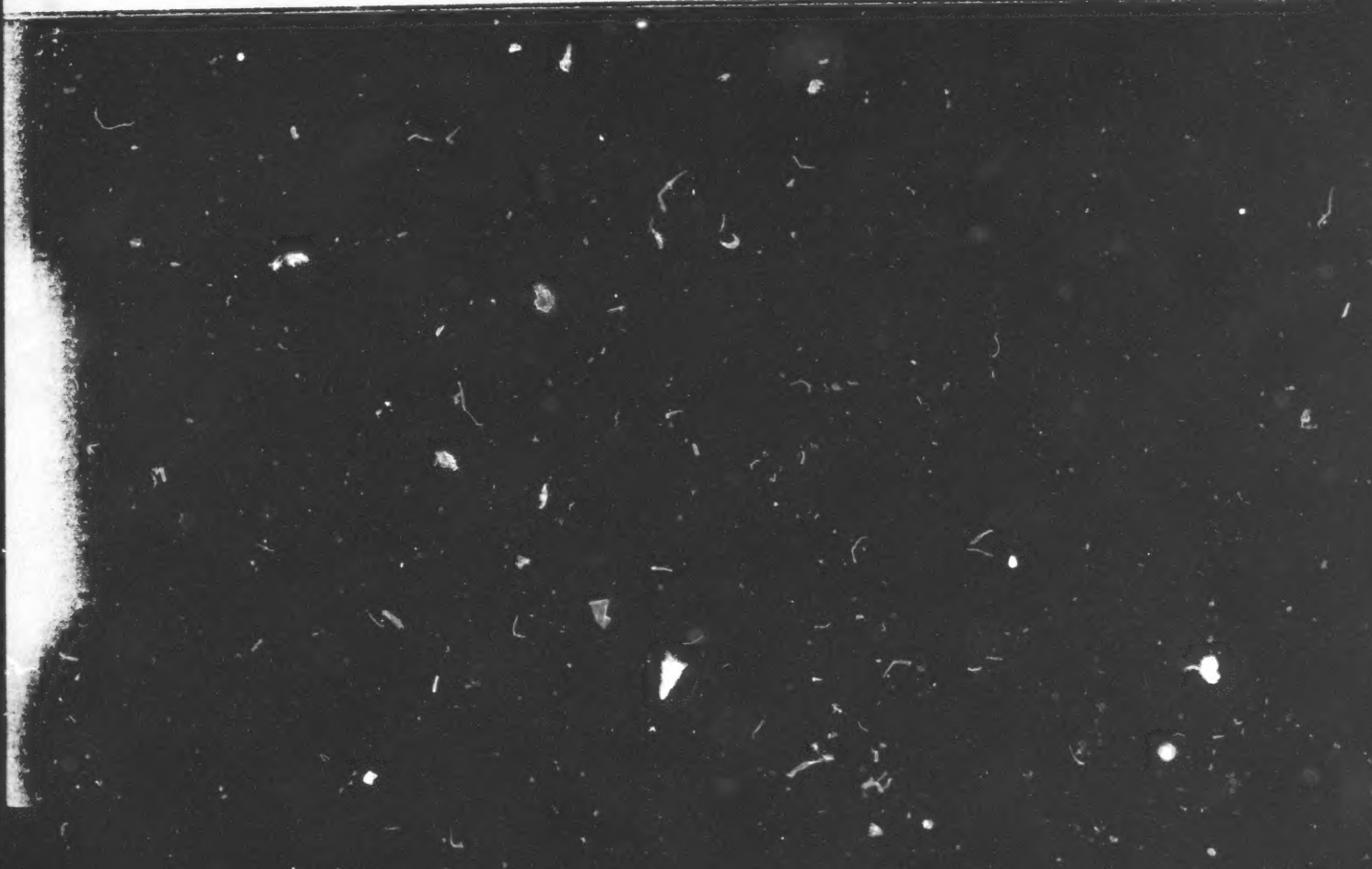

Title	Attitude Expressed	Derogatory Language	Stereotyping Terminology & Pictures	Knowledge Expressed	Usefulness	In depth Superficial
The Apache Indians	Positive	Some	T: some P: some	Ch1-5: Fair Ch 6 Poor	Fairly	Superficial
The Delaware Indians	Positive	None	T: no P: no	Excellent	Extremely	In depth
Horsemen of the Western Plains: the Nez Perce Indians	Positive	None	T: no P: yes	Fair	Extremely	In depth
The Navajo: Herders, Weavers & Silversmiths	Positive	None	T: yes P: no	Ch 1-5 Fair Ch 6 Poor	Fair	Ch1-5 In depth Ch6: Superficial
The Pueblo Indians Farmers of the Rio Grande	Positive	None	T: no P: no	Ch 1-6: Fair Ch 7-8: Poor	Ch1-6extremely Ch 7-8 Fair	Ch 1-6 In depth Ch7-8Superficial
The Seminole Indians	Positive	None	T: no P: no	Excellent	Extremely	In depth
The First Book of Eskimos	Positive	Some	T: yes P: yes	Fair	Extremely	In depth
Eagle Feather	Positive	None	T: no P: no	Excellent	Extremely	In depth

Title	Attitude Expressed	Derogatory Language	Stereotyping Terminology & Pictures	Knowledge Expressed	Usefulness	In depth Superficial
Squanto: Friend of the White Men	Positive	None	T: no P: yes	Fair	Extremely	In depth
The Story of Hiawatha	Positive	None	T: no P: yes	Excellent	Extremely	In depth
Little Herder in Autumn	Positive	None	T: no P: no	Excellent	Extremely	In depth
Runaway Boy	Positive	None	T: no P: no	Excellent	Extremely	In depth
The True Book of Little Eskimos	Positive	None	T: yes P: yes	Fair	Not useful	Superficial
Tepee Stories	Positive	None	T: little P: yes	Fair	Very useful	In depth
Wigwam Stories	Positive	None	T: no P: yes	Fair	Very	In depth
The Indian & His Pueblo	Positive	None	T: no P: no	Fair	Extremely	In depth
Indian Two Feet & His Eagle Feather	Positive	None	T: no P: yes	Poor	Fair	Very Superficial

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Title	Attitude Expressed	Derogatory Language	Stereotyping Terminology & Pictures	Knowledge Expressed	Usefulness	In depth Superficial
Pueblo Indian Stories	Positive	None	T: yes P: yes	Fair	Very	In depth
The Mighty Hunter	Positive	None	T: no P: yes	Fair	Fair	Superficial
Indian Friends & Foes	Negative	Lot	T: yes P: yes	Poor	Not useful	Biased & Superficial
The Indian & the Buffalo	Positive	None	T: no P: no	Excellent	Extremely	In depth
Indian Games & Crafts	Positive	None	T: no P: no	Excellent	Extremely	In depth
Indian Hunting	Positive	None	T: no P: no	Excellent	Extremely	In depth
Indian Music Makers	Positive	None	T: no P: no	Excellent	Extremely	In depth
Indian Picture Writing	Positive	None	T: no P. no	Excellent	Extremely	In depth
Indian Sign Language	Positive	None	T: no P: no	Excellent	Extremely	In depth

to be perpetuating negative attitudes toward the American Indian people, false myths about great American Indian leaders, and stereotypes through terminology and pictures about the various aspects of the American Indian cultures.

Children's literature has and will continue to be an important part of a child's education. Thus it will enter into his perception of himself and others, help shape each child's behavior and hence, the kind of person he becomes. Therefore I, as a concerned and sensitive teacher, don't in any way want the children I am working with affected by negatively written literature that stereotypes themselves or anyone else.

In conclusion I suggest that each school should designate a person or persons with much expertise and sensitivity to the duty of screening children's literature used at that school in the preceding catagories and in others that the school feels necessary. Teachers as myself and others I know would feel more comfortable when rapidly choosing that much needed book for an important lesson.

Footnotes

1. Gates and Peardon, *Pueblo Indian Stories*, p. 3.
2. Wharton James, *Learning From the Indians*, p. 9.
3. Dorothy Heiderstadt, *Indian Friends and Foes*, p. 107.
4. Kay Bischoff, *American Indian: Hopi and Zuni Pueblos - Read And Color*, p. 14.
5. Hildegard Thompson, *Getting to Know American Indians Today*, p. 50.
6. Teri Martini, *The True Book of Indians*, p. 45.
7. Alice Marriot, *Sequoyah: Leader of the Cherokees*, p. 65.
8. Edward and Marguerite Dolch, *Tepee Stories*, p. v.
9. Donalda McKillop Copeland, *The True Book of Little Eskimos*, p. 22.
10. Benjamin Brewster, *The First Book of Eskimos*, p. 45.

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